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ATTENTION TO GREATNESS

Buddhaghosa

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1. How Does a Philosopher Get to Be Great?

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This is not the first time I have had occasion to reflect on the question of what makes a philosopher great. I was once asked, in the course of a job interview in a philosophy department, if I *really* believed that there were philosophers in the Indian tradition as great as Plato or Kant. Being young and naïve, I set about answering by providing a description of the philosophical accomplishments of one or two cases. That was, of course, a very ineffective way to handle the question, because what the question really asked was, 'Were there any Indian philosophers who could be counted as great according to standards of greatness defined for and within the European philosophical tradition?' It was like being asked whether India had great composers, the presupposition being that to be a great composer one has to compose symphonies. Evidently, the quest for a classical Indian musician who happened to spring on the world a great symphony is likely to be forlorn, and the comparable quest in the realm of philosophy is no less quixotic. The question, moreover, sought to ensnare me in a trap, one that consists in the following vicious dilemma: either Indian philosophers are making comparable philosophical discoveries to Western philosophers, with comparable philosophical tools and techniques, or else they are not. If the first, then there is no need to study them, since the tools and discoveries are already to hand; if the second, there is no point in studying them, since what they are doing is not philosophy as 'we' understand it. In responding as I did, I merely impaled myself on the first horn of this dilemma.

A greater degree of sensitivity to the issues than I encountered among my erstwhile colleagues in philosophy was manifest in a recent symposium in Berlin entitled 'Globalizing the Classics'. In Oxford, the Classics are known as 'Greats',

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and the question 'What makes a philosopher great?' mutates into the question, 'What makes something a classic?' The Oxford classicist Edith Hall has offered an answer, speaking about this very topic in her Gaisford Lecture at the University of Oxford on June 4, 2015 (Hall 2015). Hall laments the fact that the provision of education in the classics in Britain is now highly polarized, with the classics (she means, of course, the Greek classics) exalted in private schools and elite colleges but utterly ignored in the state system and in the majority of universities outside Oxbridge. Hall argues that the classics are too special to be ghettoized, but she is more than conscious that the topic of the exceptionalism of Greek classicism is deeply tendentious. She says this (2015):

> The question has become painfully politicised. Critics of colonialism and racism tend to play down the specialness of the ancient Greeks. Those who maintain that there was something identifiably different and even superior about the Greeks, on the other hand, are often die-hard conservatives who have a vested interest in proving the superiority of 'Western' ideals and in making evaluative judgements of culture. My problem is that I fit into neither camp. I am certainly opposed to colonialism and racism, and have investigated reactionary abuses of the classical tradition in colonial India and by apologists of slavery all the way through to the American Civil War. But my constant engagement with the ancient Greeks and their culture has made me more, rather than less, convinced that they asked a series of questions which are difficult to identify in combination amongst any of the other cultures of the ancient Mediterranean or North Eastern antiquity.

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One might think that, in order to reach the conviction that the Greeks are this special, Hall would have had to spend time engaging with the non-Greek classical civilizations of India and China, about which there is not a single word in her entire lecture, although she feels confident enough to venture that 'none of these peoples produced anything quite equivalent to Athenian democracy, comic theatre, philosophical logic, or Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*.' Let me let that pass, though, because what she does say is more interesting. Hall acknowledges that many recent advances in scholarship about the cultures of the Ancient Near East have called into question the idea that the ancient Greeks were special. These advances 'have revealed how much the Greeks shared with and absorbed from their predecessors and neighbours . . . they reveal the Greek "miracle" to have been one constituent in a continuous process of intercultural exchange'. She accepts that 'taken singly, most Greek achievements can be paralleled in the culture of at least one of their neighbours': the Babylonians knew Pythagoras's theorem; the Phoenicians created the phonetic alphabet; the Hittites, also highly literate, developed chariot technology; the Egyptians, *medicina*, based on empirical experience; and so on

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for Mesopotamia, the Levant, Persia, and Asia Minor. Summing up the situation, she says this:

> Some scholars have gone so far as to ask whether the Greeks came up with anything new at all, or whether they merely acted as a conduit through which the combined wisdom of all the civilisations of the eastern Mediterranean was disseminated across the territories conquered by Alexander the Great, before arriving at Rome and posterity. Others have seen sinister racist motives at work [and have] claimed, with some justification, that northern Europeans have systematically distorted and concealed the evidence showing how much the ancient Greeks owed to Semitic and African peoples rather than to Indo-European 'Aryan' traditions.

Then in what does the special greatness of the Greeks consist? Hall's answer is as follows:

> I do not deny that the Greeks acted as a conduit for other ancient peoples' achievements. But to function successfully as a conduit, channel, or intermediary is in itself to perform an exceptional role . . . Taking over someone else's technical knowledge requires an opportunistic ability to identify a serendipitous find or encounter, excellent communicative skills, and the imagination to seek how a technique, story or object could be adapted to a different linguistic and cultural milieu . . . Of course the Greeks were not by nature or in potential superior to any other human beings, either physically or intellectually . . . But that does not mean they were not the right people, in the right place, at the right time, to take up the human baton of intellectual progress for several hundred years.

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There is, again in this comment, a certain blindness to the relay races already being run in China and India. But what I find fascinating is that the best efforts of contemporary classical scholarship to unearth that unique feature that made Greek civilization great has ended up concluding that their exceptionalism was in how well they made use of the ideas and innovations of others. Hardly exceptional enough, one would have thought, to justify Macaulay declaring that one shelf of Greek classics was of greater value to humanity than the entirety of Sanskrit literature combined.

There is an entirely comparable discussion to be had about the concept of a philosophical great. One does not need to look very far for philosophers who are willing to endorse a version of the exceptionalist position—indeed, that was the presupposition behind the question I was asked in my interview, a presupposition I was too young and naïve to challenge directly. The more sincere, among the philosophers, will perhaps be willing to concede, as Hall does, that much of what makes European philosophy exceptional consists in its borrowings

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and reworkings of borrowed ideas. If that was true in the ancient world, how much more so in the early modern, when, thanks to colonialism, Europeans were certainly 'in the right place, at the right time' to make wholesale appropriations of the intellectual innovations of others. During the period of the British colonial occupation of India, the dominant impression that the British left in the minds of Indian intellectuals was of the British as being a profoundly unphilosophical people. The Benares-based scholar James R. Ballantyne spoke of 'the impression, here yet too prevalent, that the Europeans, though capital workers in brass and iron, had better leave the discussion of things intellectual to those whose land was the birth-place of philosophy' (1859: 150). Wholesale looting of Indian ideas, without due citation, was the norm. Let me give one example. It is difficult to establish the exact influence that Indian ideas about logic may have had on the British logicians George Boole and Augustus De Morgan, although there is evidence of a line of transmission through a fellow member of the Royal Society, the brilliant Indologist and translator of Indian philosophical and mathematical texts, Henry T. Colebrooke. The absence of any mention of Indian philosophy in the philosophical work of John Stuart Mill, son of the author of the colonial manifesto *A History of British India*, James Mill, and himself an administrator in the East India Company, is quite striking; for he was in correspondence with Ballantyne, who had by then translated works in Indian logic, several of which contain accounts of a method of agreement and difference strikingly similar to Mill's own. It is more or less certain, too, that Mill read or even attended Colebrooke's famous lecture of 1827 (Colebrooke 1837), in which he described the emergentist philosophy of mind of the Indian materialist school of the Cārvāka thinker Bṛhaspati, a great philosophy that modern historians now trace back to Mill. Colebrooke's work enjoyed in general an extremely wide circulation—even Hegel had some of his writings, and his translations of Sanskrit texts about mathematics were, as I have mentioned, well-known to De Morgan and Boole. It is striking now how many of the ideas that were to find a place in British Emergentism are already available in that text—Mill, for example, using the example of chemical change to illustrate his idea of a 'heteropathic law' in *A System of Logic* (1843). It seems likely that Mill, a person whose duties as a senior official of the East India Company included correspondence with Colebrooke, and who belonged with him to a circle of London literati based around the Royal Society, had heard Colebrooke's lecture, or read it when it was published in 1837, the very time when he was working on *A System of Logic*. I cannot help but wonder whether the Indian materialist Bṛhaspati did not, after all, have a role in the emergence of British emergentism.

I say all of this only to prepare the ground for a definition of greatness in philosophy that does not rest on false presuppositions about European exceptionalism and universalism. If one asks, of a philosopher from India or China, Africa, or Mesoamerica, what makes them great, one had better not simply try to situate their philosophical accomplishments on a scale from Plato to Parfit.

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One more reason why this would be a quixotic enterprise: thinkers like Plato and Kant have been the subject of a vast philosophical industry of interpretation, especially perhaps in the last hundred years. What we think of when we think of Kant is thus the output of a great collaboration by many of the best resourced academics of the last century. No Indian or Chinese or African thinker has benefited correspondingly from well-funded study on an industrial scale. So, if we compare what is associated with the name tags 'Plato' and 'Gaṅgeśa', we are comparing the output of a great intellectual apparatus with the humble offerings of a few scholars—hardly a good way to answer the question 'Which one is great?'

I propose, then, to speak to the question by inquiring, instead, into the extent to which a thinker—whatever the source of their ideas—transforms the philosophical landscape in which they work. To count as a great, a philosopher must draw on a past intellectual history, rethink it, modify and adapt it in such a way that the landscape is irrevocably altered; indeed, in such a way that any later thinker cannot help but look back on the past as it was before that thinker as, if not antiquated, then at least as meaningful only in terms of the rearticulation that has now been provided. In the European tradition, Kant is a standout example of a philosopher who is great according to my definition; indeed, he more or less explicitly describes himself as great in such terms with his distinction between pre-critical and critical philosophy. In Sanskritic India, a list of standout examples would include such radical reinterpreters of the Buddha as Nāgārjuna and Dignāga, game-changers in the logic of inquiry like Jayanta and Gaṅgeśa, freelance philosophers such as Jayarāśi and Śrīharṣa, not to mention 'great souls' (*mahātma*) like M.K. Gandhi and K. C. Bhattacharyya (see Ganeri forthcoming). I will, however, turn my attention to a philosopher who was trained in the Sanskrit tradition but who chose to write outside it: his name is Buddhaghosa.

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2. Buddhaghosa

The fifth-century philosopher Buddhaghosa has been described as possessing 'one of the greatest minds in the history of Buddhism' (Heim 2014: 4). A cosmopolitan intellectual, Buddhaghosa moved between India and Sri Lanka, between Sanskrit and Pāli, between Hinduism and Buddhism, in search of a fundamental theory of mind. Buddhaghosa's ideas would influence conceptions of the human throughout South and Southeast Asia for a millennium and a half, and they continue to do so today. Their philosophical significance, moreover, is global in reach. As with every intellectual genius, Buddhaghosa stood on the shoulders of giants. As with every Indian intellectual genius, he prefers to say that he is merely hitching a ride. The truth is somewhere in the middle—a man of great brilliance, he owed the opportunity to be brilliant to those who had fired and fueled his intellect, in this case the Sinhāla commentators whose lost works he claims

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to summarize. One might fairly say that his writings are the distillation of a thousand years of observation and reflection in the context of a research program initiated by Śākyamuni the Buddha himself. They are more than that, though: they are also testimony to a true innovator, a pioneer, and a creative thinker. Having reviewed rival hypotheses of three of his predecessors, he wonders who is right and he answers, pointedly, 'Nobody: we should accept what is right in the claims of each' (*Fount* 287). He was an innovator, and self-consciously so, sometimes openly declaring that he was going beyond anything that can be found in the older commentaries, even acknowledging that his new thoughts had not yet gone far enough. Excellent studies of Buddhaghosa's life, affiliations, role as author and commentator, and general intellectual project have been made (Endo 2008; Collins 2009; Gethin 2012; Heim 2014, forthcoming), and here I will focus exclusively on his philosophy. Many of his original ideas are in commentaries on the canonical Abhidhamma-piṭaka, especially his *Fount of Meaning* (*Atthasālinī*, his commentary on the *Dhammasaṅgaṇī*) and *Dispeller of Delusion* (*Samoha-vinodanī*, his commentary on the *Vibhaṅga*)—and perhaps he permitted himself a little greater philosophical license there than in his manual, the *Path of Purification* (*Visuddha-magga*), a synthetic and comprehensive description of the Buddhist path, or in 'his' synoptic commentaries on the Sutta-piṭaka (the Majjhima-, Saṃyutta-, Aṅguttara-, and Dīgha-Nikāya *aṭṭhakathās*).

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To Buddhaghosa, it was evident that the study of the human mind is a common human affair. Acknowledging that open questions remain, he called on others to do the same, saying of one such extension,

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> This is just a sketch. An in-depth understanding of this question of the [function of consciousness] is only to be gained on the strength of one's selection after considering views, one's estimation of reasons, one's preferences and credences, learning and testimonial reports.
>
> *(Fount 74)*

Some writers on Buddhaghosa have felt it necessary to try to demonstrate that all of his ideas are *already* in earlier works, not merely in the early Sinhāla commentators, but in the canonical Abhidhamma itself—a project somewhat akin to arguing that all of Plotinus is already in Plato. Another trend, in tension with the first, has been to assume that every conceptual development is an instance of philosophical progress, historians and historiographers claiming that the ideas of the Buddhist philosophers who came after Buddhaghosa—the 'Buddhist epistemologists' like Dignāga and Dharmakīrti, for example, or the Madhyamaka philosophy of Candrakīrti—render obsolete Buddhaghosa's own theories (I will say more about Dignāga later). Neither trend does justice to his greatness. It is, for example, only because of Buddhaghosa's spirit of open inquiry that the question recently posed by Theravāda Buddhist modernizers like the Burmese activist and Nobel Laureate Aung San Suu Kyi, the question whether Buddhism

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has the resources to articulate distinctive conceptions of human rights grounded in non-Kantian understandings of dignity, can hope for an answer.

In the works of Buddhaghosa, we find a philosophy of mind completely free from the grip of the picture that has captivated—and enslaved—speculation about the mind in the west: the picture of the mind as 'mediational', the picture that Charles Taylor describes—using the first person plural to aggregate deep trends of thought in the Western world—as 'a big mistake operating in our culture, a kind of operative (mis)understanding of what it is to know, which has had dire effects on both theory and practice in a host of domains' (2013: 61). What is clear is how thoroughly Buddhaghosa is distanced from a 'mediational' picture of the relationship between mind and world, which has it that reality is taken up by way of an inner self performing mental operations on internal representations. In what follows, I will give three examples of Buddhaghosan greatness. I will claim that we can legitimately speak of him as the founder of a distinct stance in philosophy, as Analytical Philosophy and Phenomenology are stances. I will show how he transforms an ancient metaphor in order to provide a new understanding of human agency. And I will demonstrate that he has a sophisticated analysis of human beings in relation to one another, a theory of our engagement with each other in the social world.

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3. Buddhaghosa's Attentionalism

Attentionalism, as I will call the stance that lends attention centrality in explanatory projects in philosophy, encourages us to rethink many central concepts in the philosophy of mind from an attention-theoretic perspective. It is a policy, not a proposition; a body of guidelines as to how to think about the mind. Van Fraassen says that 'a philosophical position can consist in a stance (attitude, commitment, approach, a cluster of such)' (2002: 48), and the idea is helpfully elaborated by Anjan Chakravartty (2004: 175), who comments that

> a stance is a strategy, or a combination of strategies, for generating factual beliefs. A stance makes no claim about reality, at least directly, It is rather a sort of epistemic 'policy' concerning which methodologies should be adopted in the generation of factual beliefs . . . Stances are not themselves propositional; they are guidelines for ways of acting. One does not believe a stance in the way one believes a fact. Rather one commits to a stance, or adopts it.

Buddhaghosa's Attentionalism is strikingly on display in the organizational structure of his most famous work, *The Path to Purification*. The whole book takes the overt form of a sustained reflection on the meaning of a single quotation from the Canon: 'Cultivate attention, bhikkhus; a bhikkhu who attends knows things as they are' (*samādhiṃ, bhikkhave, bhāvetha; samāhito, bhikkhave, bhikkhu*

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yathābhūtaṃ pajānāti, S iii.13). The book begins and ends with this quotation, and its contents are substantially devoted to exploring the meaning of this one statement. What is put forward here is an application of a general epistemic principle: that attention is, in normal circumstances, sufficient for knowledge. The application in question speaks of a particular sort of attention, expert absorbed attention (*samādhi*), and a particular sort of knowledge, insight (*paññā*) into fundamental moral truths. Much is to be said about the varieties of attention, about what expertise consists in and how it is cultivated, about the relationship between attention, perceptual experience, consciousness, knowledge, and truth. Buddhaghosa's discussion of the nature of consciousness and attention is indeed of unparalleled brilliance. Conscious perceptual experience is a form of active involvement with the world, while cognitive processes transform the mind's first acknowledgments into fully intentional thought. There is no self as controlling agent of thinking, believing, and feeling. Attention instead is what explains the activity of thought and mind.

Yet it is striking that there is no single word in Pāli or Sanskrit for English 'attention', and from Buddhaghosa's perspective the search for something that can be called the essence of attention is a mistake. Buddhaghosa's view is rather, as we might put it, that there are many kinds of attention. These kinds of attention are put to work to explain perception, memory, testimony, self-awareness, empathy, and end-of-life experience, and they are all, Buddhaghosa further claims, fundamentally grounded in the embodied sense modalities. He is against representations and so against Representationalism, and he dispenses with an earlier perceptual model of introspection, but he is in favor of the inseparability of intentional content and phenomenal character. In his treatment of the cognitive processes of attentional capture, he anticipates the concept of working memory, the idea of mind as a global workplace, subliminal orienting, and the thesis that visual processing occurs at three levels. He is unlike nearly every other Buddhist philosopher in that he discusses episodic memory and knows it as a reliving of experience from one's personal past; but he blocks any reduction of the phenomenology of temporal experience to the representation of oneself as in the past. The alternative claim that episodic memory is a phenomenon of attention is one that he develops with greater sophistication than has been done elsewhere. He attentional analysis of empathy, our ability to know the minds of others, is similarly innovative. He agrees with the ancients, and with thinkers like Simone Weil and Iris Murdoch who have drawn inspiration from them, in claiming that moral attention—the settling on what is good (i.e., wholesome, *kusala*) and the shunning of what is bad (*akusala*)—is a distinct ethical virtue. At the end of life, he says, one attends to that which has given one's life its significance.

Buddhaghosa's Attentionalism is a stance distinct from the stances of Phenomenology and Analytical Philosophy, and should not be conflated with either. His attention-theoretic approach brings important new options to the

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table in contemporary philosophy of mind and cognitive science, providing new directions to recent work on the pervasiveness of the mental, embodied cognition, cognitive phenomenology, intersubjectivity, and the experience of time. Two large bodies of data about attention are available to an aspiring Attentionalist today: first, the rich experimental studies of contemporary cognitive psychology—and it has been argued that attention is, of all cognitive functions, the most thoroughly studied—and second, Buddhaghosa's treatment the information that emerged as a result of meticulous Buddhist observation of the human mind's structure and functioning in the first 1,000 years after the Buddha lived.

4. Human Agency

That the Buddhist denial of 'self' (*atta*) is a denial of the specific notion of self as origin of willed directives is hinted at by canonical passages such as this:

> People are intent on the idea of 'I-making' and attached to the idea of 'other-making'. Some don't realise this, nor do they see it as an arrow. But to one who, having extracted this arrow, sees, [the thought] 'I am doing,' doesn't occur, [the thought] 'Another is doing' doesn't occur.
>
> *(Udāna 6.6)*

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An identification of self with control, and the rejection of it, is more exactly formulated in another key canonical text, the *Sutta on the Definition of No-Self*, which has the Buddha declaring of intending, and indeed of any constituent of a mental life, that

> intending is nonself. For if, bhikkus, intending were self . . . it would be possible to have it of intending, 'Let my intending be thus; let my intending not be thus'. . . But because intending is nonself . . . it is not possible to have it of intending, 'Let my intending be thus; let my intending not be thus'.
>
> *(S.iii.66–7; M.i.230–3)*

Here, an equivalence is affirmed between the denial of self and the denial of voluntariness or volition in intention. The Buddha's leading argument against a conception of self as the agent of mental (and physical) acts is that every constituent of a mental life is subject to change, and 'Is what is impermanent, suffering, and subject to change fit to be regarded thus: "This is mine, this I am, this is my self?" ' (S.iii.67). It may help to imagine, as fictional genealogy, the conception having arisen by taking as primary an account of distanced control and transferring it to the case of self-control. For indeed, in such texts as the *Bhagavad-gītā*, human beings are portrayed as remotely

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governed, a divine agent responsible for all of their apparently autonomous acts: 'O Arjuna, the Lord resides in the heart-area of all beings, making all beings revolve through his magical power [as if they were] mounted on a machine' (*Bh.Gī.* 18.61). Madhūsudana explains the phrase 'mounted on a machine' (*yantrārūḍhāni*) as meaning 'just like a magician who causes the completely non-independent wooden human forms, etc., to revolve, seated on a machine, etc., moved by a rope'. The idea of an inner agent whose intentions causes actions comes into being when the magician or puppeteer in this depiction of distal control is simply internalized: the self is now an inner magician pulling the strings that cause the human body to move. Śaṃkara's comments on *Bh.Gī.* 4.13 can be read as straightforwardly rejecting the causal theory of action while allowing room for some conception of self other than an agentive one. In fact it is harmless enough to refer to overt actions as having an agent because there is the physical human being to stand in that role, but at the moment when we offer the same description of mental actions, the rejected 'Authorship View' of self materializes as if from nowhere (Peacocke 2007, 2014).

A debunking genealogy of the origins of this theory of human agency helps to loosen its grip. A human being is not like a drone, with a detached if now internalized control center, but is instead more like a self-driving vehicle whose various complex perceptual, motor, and planning systems enable it to navigate its environment. There is no driver, no charioteer, no inner magician; rather, there is a complex of mutually interacting components. It is in order to articulate this alternative model that Buddhaghosa appropriates but transforms the metaphor of the machine. He expresses the idea that human beings are without inner originators of mental action, by likening them to mechanical dolls or marionettes, which seem, but only seem, as if they are animated from within:

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> Just as a mechanical doll (*dāru-yanta*) is empty (*suñña*), soulless (*nijjiva*), and undirected (*nirīhaka*), and while it walks and stands merely through the combination of strings and wood, yet it seems as if it had direction and occupation (*savyāpāra*); so too, this minded body (*nāma-rūpa*) is empty, soulless and undirected, and while it walks and stands merely through the combination of the two together, yet it seems as if it had direction and occupation.
>
> *(Path 594 [xviii.31])*

The point of the analogy is not, of course, to deny that human beings have intentions in and for action (*cetanā*); and, when it is said that intentional action is like the movement of a mechanical doll, the point is not that our actions are entirely mechanical and automatic, but is instead that, just as the marionette's movements seem—but only seem—as if produced by an inner

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directing self within, so likewise do ours. In fact, they are not: they are simply the bodily aspect of an intention in action, the intention itself embodied. The metaphor of the marionette is introduced only to resist that of the charioteer:

> There isn't some sort of self inside that does the bending and stretching [when one sits up] . . . there is no self of any kind inside which puts on the robe [when one puts on a robe] . . . there is no self of any kind inside which does the eating [when one eats].
>
> *(Dispeller 258–62)*

Agent causalism and the Authorship View are clearly identified as the target: 'There is no agent (*kattā*) or author (*kāretā*) who says, "Let you be the untasked state, you be sense-door instruction, you be seeing, you be receiving, you be examining, you be determining, you be running" ' (*Fount* 271–2).

There is an alternative both to imagining that all human action must have its origin in a detached agent and its intentions and depicting human beings as entirely passive, deterministically propelled by efficient causation, and that is to understand that mindedness, notably attention, is already an activity. 'Is there such a thing as action? Yes. Is there such a thing as the author of action (*karma-kārako*)? No, that cannot be truly said,' the *Kathāvatthu* succinctly puts it, continuing, 'Is action one thing, the author of it something else? No, that cannot be truly said' (*Kathāvatthu* 53). One need not deny that it is possible, as a matter of grammatical convention, to speak of an 'author' of experiencing whenever there is an experience, or an 'author' of acting whenever there is an action. In Indo-European languages, at least, one can always reformulate the description of an activity ('the flowing of water') in a subject-predicate grammatical form ('the water flows'). Yet the move from the grammatical truism that, for every activity there is something we can designate as its 'agent', to the claim that there is a single agent of every action is clearly fallacious (technically, it is known as a quantifier-shift fallacy). Buddhists make the point by saying that the agentive construction is simply an idiomatic way of speaking, an 'accessory locution' (*sasambhāra-kathā*), like 'His bow shot him' meaning '*An arrow* from his bow shot him,' or as the phrase 'on seeing a visible object with the eye' is idiomatic for 'on seeing a visible object with a moment of visual awareness' (*Path* 20; cf. Karunadasa 2010: 147). Similarly, commonplace attributions of agency to physical objects ('the knife cuts well'; 'the washing machine has nearly finished its cycle') are neither problematic nor exciting.

It would evidently be quite wrong to conclude from his appeal to the marionette simile that Buddhaghosa's view is that a mental life is entirely passive. Rather, a quite different account of the distinction between activity and passivity is put forward. Mental activity is described first as a conscious 'bending' (*namana*) of mind onto world, which 'bending' consists in being in conscious

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concomitance (*cetasika*) with the intentionality of the mental (*citta*) (*Path* 527 [xvii.48], 588 [xviii.4]; *Dispeller* 136). Active mindedness (*nāma*) includes attentional selecting (overt or covert focusing on one from among a group of leaves in the field of awareness), attentional placing (centering one leaf by excluding others), attentional rehearsing (repeating a number one has been given while looking for a piece of paper, or an image of a leaf that has gone out of view so as to identify it when it reappears), and attentional effort (a 'straining' that substitutes for will). Other ways by which mind 'bends' onto world include felt evaluating (for a pain is not a brute happening but is instead an evaluation of something as harmful and a corresponding shrinking away), cognitively assigning mental labels to enable identification or recognition (seeing Ānanda as 'Ānanda'), and preserving the boundaries of an experience in relation to others. Accompanying, and in *some* sense prior to, all of these activities is the activity of becoming 'in touch' with the world, a minimally active operational intentionality, a perceptual presence to the world that hovers in a grey area between active intentionality and embodied passivity (*rūpa*), where passivity has to be understood in terms of the notion of being 'molested' (*rūpana*) by the world's causal influence. These are the activities that go on inside intentional consciousness, but none is rightly thought of as the voluntary performance of an agent. If 'bending' onto the world is a modulation of conscious intentionality, another notion of mental activity is also available, one that consists in 'tasking' the mind through the activation of a variety of cognitive psychological modules (*mano-dhātu*). Such activities include subliminal orienting, constructing a sensory field, perceptually processing a stimulus to identify spatial boundaries and object category, late attentional gate-keeping, and the 'running' (*javana*) of working memory. This is a psychological or cognitive scientific notion of mental activity at a level underneath that of conscious thought. The most minimal such activity is the sending of an instruction (*āvajjana*; 'turning toward') to a sensory system to turn on or open up, a subliminal orienting toward a stimulus. Untasked thought (*bhavaṅga*, the rest or default state) is now what is to be described as 'passive'; the content of the default state consists in a residue of 'innate' autobiographical semantic information.

In order to appreciate the greatness of Buddhaghosa's approach to human agency, it may be helpful to compare it with a contrasting appeal to the marionette metaphor in a recent book by Peter Carruthers. He puts the idea as follows (2015b, summarizing his 2015a):

> In this manner our conscious minds are continually under the control of our unconscious thoughts. We [unconsciously] decide what to pay attention to, what to remember, what to think of, what to imagine, and what sentences to rehearse in inner speech. There is control, of course, and it is a form of self-control. But it is not control by a conscious self. Rather what we take to be the conscious self is a puppet manipulated by our

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> unconscious goals, beliefs, and decisions. Who's in charge? Well, we are. But the 'we' who are in charge are not the conscious selves we take ourselves to be, but rather a set of unconsciously operating mental states. Consciousness does make a difference. Indeed, it is vital to the overall functioning of the human mind. But a controlling conscious self is an illusion.

Carruthers's 'conscious self' is what we are calling the Authorship View of Self or the 'mythological monad of practical reason', and he agrees that it is an illusion. Yet Carruthers's position is instructively distinct from the one to be defended by Buddhaghosa. He argues that control mechanisms are only unconscious, and that they consist in the operations of working memory. This, though, has the counter-intuitive effect of rendering intentional action unconscious: 'beliefs, goals, and decisions are never conscious. Rather, these states pull the strings in the background, selecting and manipulating the sensory-based contents that do figure in consciousness . . . we are under the illusion that the decision is a conscious one' (ibid.); 'all decisions are unconscious, resulting from competitive interactions among goals, desires, information, and/or action plans' (2015a: 237). So, when Carrutthers describes the conscious mind as a marionette, what *he* means is that its strings are pulled by subpersonal-level operations. Paraphrased in Buddhist terminology, Carruthers's picture has it that the only way for mindedness to be active is in the activation of cognitive modules, and that this activity is causally determinative of apparent conscious activity. What this shows is that Carruthers is committed to the Authorship View, with its claim that the only way for conscious thought to be autonomous is for it to be authored. Buddhaghosa avoids this commitment by drawing a careful distinction between the two notions of minded activity mentioned earlier. In terms of the marionette metaphor, the whole point is that one must not make the mistake of thinking that the control mechanisms pulling the strings have to be subpersonal causal determinants: there are other sorts of determinative interdependencies between the conscious concomitants that modulate intentional awareness, the various 'consciousness-level' factors that actively contribute to being in a conscious intentional state, and that jointly operate together as a single system. Our conscious mental lives are controlled neither from *outside* nor from *below*: their autonomy is *sui generis*.

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5. Empathy: Awareness of Others

Empathy relates to a person's ability to comprehend the intentions, emotions, and other states of mind of another, to assume what can be called a 'second-personal' view in which others appear not merely as bodies but as embodied 'you's. The term 'empathy' is used here as a translation of the German *Einfühlung* (Zahavi 2010: 289), meaning the idea of an ability to acknowledge others as

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others, and in that sense to understand others, rather than the idea of concern for or care for others: 'Whereas empathy has to do with a basic understanding of expressive others, sympathy adds care or concern for the other' (Zahavi 2008: 516). Empathy, in this sense, is an awareness *of* the mental state of another while sympathy is a concern *for* their mental state. Such an ability has standardly been interpreted as consisting either in the individual's possession of a theory of mind that enables them to attribute states of mind in virtue of the other's behavior (so-called theory-theory), or else as involving a simulation of the other's states of mind by mirroring or imagining them as one's own. Much of the contemporary discussion in social cognition concerns the respective merits of theory-theory and simulation. Recently, an interesting third proposal has been put forward, that empathy has to do rather with the direct acquaintance of another's attitudes in and through their bodily expression (Gallagher 2005; Zahavi 2007, 2008, 2010; Gangopadhyay 2014). Zahavi finds the view anticipated in Max Scheler's (1954: 260) remark that

> we certainly believe ourselves to be directly acquainted with another person's joy in his laughter, with his sorrow and pain in his tears, with his shame in his blushing, with his entreaty in his outstretched hands . . . If anyone tells me that this is not 'perception' . . . I would beg him to . . . address the phenomenological facts.

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According to this analysis, empathy consists in a type of perception of others' mental lives. Empathy is 'our ability to access the mind of others in their bodily and behavioural expressions' (Zahavi 2008: 522). Note that Zahavi prefers to speak of 'experiential access' rather than 'perception', perhaps reflecting discomfort with Scheler's idea that empathy is literally a perceptual skill.

Buddhaghosa's analysis is radically different: what he says is that social cognition is a proprietary kind of attention. Prior to theoretical understanding of others as minded beings there is a form of embodied intersubjective engagement in which the other's embodied actions serve to enable direct attention to them as intentional others. In Buddhaghosa's embodied approach to social cognition, perception of the other's bodily deportment does not constitute experiential access to their state of mind but rather enables a proprietary sort of attention to it. The idea is that there is a way in which a conscious being disposes itself, which serves to 'intimate' the mental state within. It is not the consciousness-endowed body as such, but a very particular change of mode, which endowment with consciousness enables, by which the body is kept firm, held up, and moved. Buddhaghosa states that the distinctive movement of the eyes is an *intimation* of a person's intention to look (*Dispeller* 356). The intimation can be called an instrumental bodily act (*kāyika-karaṇa*). One does not just see the intimation in another's posture and movement; one notices the other's intentions through the embodied intimation:

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> What does it intimate? One [kind of] bodily instrumentality; for someone standing in the eye's focus lifts up a head or a foot or shifts the head or an eyebrow. Now this mode of [comportment of] the hand, etc., is cognizable by the eye; but the intimation is not cognizable by the eye, it is cognizable only by the mind. For by means of the eye one only sees colours excited by the alteration in the hand, etc., but one knows the intimation by means of late attentional gate-keeping [lit. mind-door cognizance] cognizing that 'He seems to be doing such and such'.
>
> *(Fount 83)*

A certain bodily comportment, a 'stiffening, alteration, and movement of the body', when attended to in a certain way, falls under the description 'He seems to be beckoning me.' A possible reading of these comments is that they simply formulate the standard argument that the mental states of others can be inferred from their observable physical behavior. Some support for that reading indeed comes from the examples that Buddhaghosa employs: the door of a wine shop bears a flag, and people know 'There is wine here'; the tree moves about, and people know 'There is wind'; the fish let out bubbles, and people know 'There are fish in the water'; and, from the tangle of leaves, grass, and rubbish, people know 'There was a flood' (*Fount* 83). One can easily read these comments as pointing to acts of inference, from an observed sign to something else that is mentally deduced (*mano-viññeya*). Yet that reading is a mistake. For Buddhaghosa has been very careful and circumspect in his formulation of the claim. He has said that one sees a displacement in the body, and one then ascribes to another an intention, with a thought process not itself caused by perceptual processing. Here the attribution of an intention has exactly the same cognitive profile as the cases we reviewed before, such as thinking of a past event *because of having seen* it before, with one's thought process triggered by some current cue. Likewise, here one attributes an intention *because of having seen* the bodily comportment. So, we should describe the claim as being that social cognition is attention to others' states of mind, with one's perception of their behavior serving not as a reason but as a cause. You raise your aim and, through that, my attention is drawn to your intention to beckon me.

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If this is right, then Buddhaghosa's account of our ability to be aware of the mental states of others is that their bodily demeanor enables us to attend to their intentions, wishes, preferences, and so on. Posture and movement are attention-enabling, rather than inference-enabling, conditions in our consciousness of others' minds. Moreover, given that we are not thinking of such states as 'inner entities', and given that Buddhaghosa always ties the contents of consciousness to the sense modalities, what we should say is that our thought about another's intention or desire consists in a peculiar manner in which we attend due to their bodily posture and demeanor. That way of attending just is what it is to entertain the thought, 'He wants me to do this.'

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6. Buddhaghosa's Legacy

A way to gain an appreciation of a philosopher's greatness is to compare them with great successors. Dignāga (480–540 CE) is a Buddhist philosopher who spent his working life in the Buddhist university of Nālandā, one of the most impressive institutions of higher education in South Asia—indeed, in its time, in the world. Dignāga owed much to internal dialogue with a contemporary of his, the grammarian-cum-philosopher Bhartṛhari. His disciple Dharmakīrti would go on to reinvent Dignāga's innovation and adapt it to the needs of new Buddhist communities in ways of which Dignāga himself may not have imagined, most notably by giving it an idealist inflection. Dignāga's break-through work was decisive in shaping the next period of Indian philosophy, a cosmopolitan Age of Dialogue in Sanskrit that runs at least until the transitioning of Buddhists like Kamalaśīla to Tibet. An emerging scholarly consensus agrees in identifying Dignāga as marking the beginning of a new era in Indian philosophical thought, some scholars emphasizing his theoretical innovations and others his transformation of discursive practice (Lusthaus 2002: 363; McCrea 2013: 129–30). Dignāga's new citational and critical practices were swiftly adopted by his opponents. As important as these shifts in doctrinal formulation and discursive practice was the transformation that Dignāga achieved in ways of reasoning, with a movement away from an epistemic localism to a rule-based universalism. Now, too, the precise formulation of definitions of key philosophical concepts takes center-stage as constitutive of philosophical practice, rival definitions of what purports to be a single concept locking horns in contexts of philosophical debate. Rapidly, this became the hallmark of philosophical activity in a broad Sanskrit cosmopolis that was to endure for centuries and whose geographical borders spread well beyond the subcontinent.

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From a point of view centered on Buddhaghosa, however, Dignāga is to be held to account for introducing into the history of Buddhist philosophy of mind not only the Myth of Mediation but also the Myth of the Given, 'the fatal dichotomy between a supposedly brutely given, nonconceptual sensory content and free, rationally articulated belief' (Carman 2013: 167), by reducing the role of concepts to that of pawns in the game of inference, with his celebrated redefinition of perceptual experience as that which is free from conceptual construction. One could say, in very general terms, that Sanskritic discourse about mind began with Dignāga to become sharply polarized between advocates of an experiential and phenomenological approach and proponents of a conceptualist and normative approach. The greatness of Buddhaghosa, we can now appreciate, is that it talks about the mind without this polarization, and it searches for a theory in which the claims of the experiential and the normative are respected in equal measure. If the ambition of a theory of mind is to account for the unity that exists between the demands of experience and of reason, then this is the literature in which an answer is most likely to found.

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Perhaps, indeed, this is another mark of greatness—that the work of a great philosopher can withstand the vicissitudes of philosophical fashion, and always threatens a return.

Buddhaghosa's influence on the development of Buddhist philosophy in Sri Lanka, Burma (Myanmar), Cambodia, Laos, and Thailand has been and continues to be immense. Important innovations do certainly occur in these countries after him, in the work of Ānanda, Dhammapāla$_1$, Dhammapāla$_2$, and Anuruddha, as well as in nineteenth-century Burmese reinventions that are also in part responses to British colonial occupation. In fact, from the fifth to the eighth century a vast Hindu and Theravāda intellectual civilization spread throughout Southeast Asia, the full story of which has yet be chronicled (a beginning is made in Guy 2014), but one in which Buddhaghosa was surely a defining intellectual presence. I began by suggesting that, to count as a great, a philosopher must draw on a past intellectual history, rethink it, and adapt it in such a way that the landscape is irrevocably altered—indeed, in such a way that any later thinker cannot help but look back on the past as it was before that thinker as, if not antiquated, then at least as meaningful only in terms of the rearticulation that has now been provided. Buddhaghosa drew on an already very rich philosophical landscape, based on a thousand years of analysis and reflection on the thought of the Buddha, which he transformed into a new theory of the human subject, of persons as living entities with a characteristic capacity for attention. I think that's pretty great.

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